

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM

TOM DAVIS, CHAIRMAN



MEDIA ADVISORY

For Immediate Release
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Government Reform to Review D.C.'s Handgun Ban

Do the Gun Laws Encourage or Prevent Crime?

**What: Government Reform Committee Oversight Hearing:
"Under Fire: Does the District of Columbia's Gun Ban Help or Hurt
the Fight Against Crime?"**

When: TUESDAY, JUNE 28, 2005 at 2:30 P.M.

Where: ROOM 2154, RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

Background:

In 1973, Congress passed the District of Columbia Self-Government and Governmental Reorganization Act (Home Rule Act), giving the District the right to elect a Mayor and a Council and authorizing the District to legislate and manage its affairs. The Home Rule Act gives the District Council broad authority, subject to the approval of Congress, to regulate firearms.

On June 26, 1976, the District of Columbia Council passed the Firearms Control Regulations Act of 1975, a law prohibiting the possession of unregistered firearms, and banned the registration of all handguns, automatic firearms, and high-capacity semi-automatic firearms. The District's ban on handguns makes it illegal for anyone to own a handgun unless he or she is a police officer or has owned a gun registered prior to 1976. Sales of firearms are similarly restricted. Many observers view the District's gun laws among the strictest of any jurisdiction in the nation. Various lawsuits have been filed in recent years questioning the constitutionality of the D.C. gun law under the Second Amendment. So far, the Courts have upheld the ban.

During the 108th Congress, the U.S. House of Representatives approved a bill that would repeal the District's gun laws. The Senate did not take up the measure. At the beginning of the 109th Congress, bills repealing the ban are currently before Congress. Congressman Mark Souder (R-IN) introduced H.R. 1288 in the House and Senator Kay

Bailey Hutchinson (R-TX) introduced S. 1082 in the Senate. The identical bills, known as the District of Columbia Personal Protection Act, would limit the authority of the D.C. Council and Mayor to regulate the possession of firearms in the city.

Supporters of the legislation say that the city's high homicide rate demonstrates the ban's ineffectiveness and that citizens should be allowed to defend themselves with handguns. Others argue that repealing the ban would flood the streets with guns and halt the continuing decline in the homicide rate. Murders in D.C. fell 20 percent from 248 in 2003 down to 198 in 2004, the lowest level in 18 years.

The Government Reform Committee will examine this debate by conducting an oversight hearing on the District of Columbia's gun control laws. The Committee will explore the effect of repealing the District's gun laws, examine the District of Columbia's policy to combat violent crimes, and discuss the constitutional issues relating to the District of Columbia gun laws.

Witnesses:

Panel I

The Honorable Anthony Williams, Mayor, District of Columbia

Mr. Charles H. Ramsey, Chief of Police, Metropolitan Police Department

Panel II

Mr. John R. Lott, Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute

Mr. Robert A. Levy, Senior Fellow in Constitutional Studies, The Cato Institute

Mr. Robert Peck, President, Greater Washington Board of Trade

Reverend Lionel Edmonds, Co-Chair, Washington Interfaith Network

Ms. Sandra Seegers, District of Columbia Resident

Mr. Tyrone Parker, Executive Director, Alliance of Concerned Men

Ms. Francine Lowe, District of Columbia Resident

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